

February 26, 2023 – First Sunday of Lent
Three Most Dangerous Temptations
Gospel of Matthew 4:1-11
Fr. John

The gospel for the first Sunday of Lent always begins with the temptations of Jesus in the desert just after he is baptised by John at the Jordan River and before he begins his public ministry.

The scriptures tells us that he fasted for 40 days and 40 nights which leads us to believe he was in a weakened state when the devil shows up. It seems the evil one always shows up whenever we are most vulnerable.

Often when we read this passage, our tendency is to sit on the sidelines or ringside and cheer on Jesus as he goes three rounds with the devil.

The trouble with that approach is that it reduces us to the role of being mere spectators. We have to realize that Jesus' fight is **our** fight as well.

We deal with the same temptations - and they are classic temptations to be sure!

If we use a boxing analogy, in round one, the devil tries to make us fall with the punch of **instant self-gratification** - the desire to get what we want immediately. Electronic technology, for all its positive innovations, has conditioned us to expect instant results. We use remote controls to start our vehicles, switch on the TV and change channels, and operate many of our modern day appliances. If we want information on something, we go to Google. Social media has afforded us the opportunity to express 'knee jerk' reactions before we really have time to ponder and think about an issue.

Perhaps the 'bread' which the evil one tempts us, as he tempted Jesus, feeds on our impatience and comes in the form of easy, painless solutions to complex issues. One only has to think about the dignity of life issues such as abortion, medically assisted deaths, mental health issues, and homelessness. It's easy to sit back and put out our opinions and ideologies, but when we deal with real situations and real people there is seldom a 'silver bullet' solution. Jesus reminds us that we counter relying on God's wisdom, which may not be instantly forthcoming but requires us to struggle in order that we may grow in spiritual maturity, mercy, and forgiveness.

As we enter the second round, the devil comes at Jesus, taunting him to show his power by leaping off the pinnacle of the temple and proving his specialness. Very few of us would consider ourselves to be a public celebrity. However, there is that inner urge to have our fifteen minutes of fame. And while we all need affirmation - it shouldn't be attained by a sense of entitlement. Our blessedness is not predicated what we may accomplish that wins the admiration of others, but rather in knowing that we are loved by God. Jesus' rebuff to Satan is, 'No thank you - I'll take the stairs down like everybody else.' If we really believe in the Incarnation we must believe that Jesus had no elevator or escalator. He climbed the same stairs and walked the paths that we walk.

When we get to round three, the devil shows Jesus all the glory, riches, and power of the kingdoms of the world and promises them to Jesus if only he will bow down and worship him. The temptation here is that of power and control. We may not be in a position like a dictator or oligarch to lord it over vast populations or have access to billions in economic power. However we might still grasp for the kind of control that overrides the opinions and rights of others. We might still be playing the game of one ups-man-ship, always wanting to 'win' the argument or debate to show our superiority.

The bottom line in all these temptations may lie in the fear that we are not loved by God and that somehow we have to prove ourselves to Him. But when we are able to name that fear, and accept that we are indeed God's beloved child, these temptations have no power over us. And we will be able to confidently say to the evil one, 'Be gone! Away with you! I will follow the Lord my God and serve only Him.' These words would be uttered by Jesus later in the Garden of Gethsemane when the devil returned for a return bout. 'Father if it be your will, let this cup pass from me, but nevertheless not my will but yours be done'.